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Secretary Norton Designates the Gibson House in Massachusetts as a National Historic Landmark

WASHINGTON-- Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton today announced the designation of the Gibson House in Boston, Massachusetts, as a National Historic Landmark (NHL). The Gibson House is one of 15 sites recommended to the Secretary by the National Park System Advisory Board for their national significance in American history and culture.

The 15 new NHLs also include the Sheldon Jackson School, Sitka, Alaska; Fresno Sanitary Landfill, Fresno, Calif.; Samuel Wadsworth Russell House, Middletown, Conn.; Nicholas Jarrot Mansion, Cahokia, Ill.; S.R. Crown Hall, Chicago, Ill.; J.C. Lore Oyster House, Solomons, Md.; Dutch Reformed Church, Newburgh, N.Y.; *Modesty*, West Sayville, N.Y.; Rudolph Oyster House, West Sayville, N.Y.; Bethania Historic District, Bethania, N.C.; Merchants' Exchange Building, Philadelphia, Pa.; Randolph Field Historic District, Bexar County, Texas; New Kent School and George W. Watkins School, New Kent County, Va.; John Philip Sousa Jr. High School, Washington, D.C.

"These special sites underscore our heritage and tell stories of periods and events in our history," Norton said. "By preserving these unique sites, we share our culture and rich diversity with our children for future generations to learn from and enjoy."

NHLs are identified by theme and special studies prepared or overseen by National Park Service (NPS) historians and archaeologists. The NPS often conducts NHL studies in partnership with federal, state, tribal or local preservation officials; the academic community; independent scholars; and others knowledgeable about a particular subject. The Gibson House was nominated for embodying distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type exceptionally valuable for a study of the period, style or method of construction.

"National Historic Landmarks guide us in comprehending important trends and patterns in American history," said Mainella. "The Gibson House possesses those exceptional qualities that help us as a Nation illuminate and understand our complex national heritage."

The Gibson House is nationally significant as a rare and probably unique surviving example of an intact Victorian row house, which serves as a record of urban American domestic life during the decades spanning the Civil War and the First World War. Remarkably preserved, its interior survives as a record of upper-middle-class life from the period of the Gibson family's tenure in the house. Its original interior decorations from the years 1860-1916, along with its collections of family furniture, books, rugs, draperies, paintings, prints, porcelain, decorative objects and utilitarian domestic items, are an important resource for understanding how urban upper-middle-class American households lived in the Victorian era. The importance of the house extends to its architectural interiors, which represent the technological advances being made in row houses at the time. The Gibson House contains elements in its exterior and interior design, which were innovative and distinctive for the period.

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All NHLs are included in the National Register of Historic Places, which is the nation's official list of the cultural resources and historic properties worthy of preservation. Landmarks constitute 2,341, or roughly 3 percent of approximately 73,000 sites listed in the National Register; the others are of state and local significance.

Most NHLs are owned by private individuals or groups. Others are owned by local, state, tribal, or federal government agencies, or may have mixed public-private ownership. Owners of NHLs are free to manage their property as they choose, provided no federal license, permit, or funding is involved. The owner agrees to observe simple preservation precepts with respect to the property and receives technical advice and assistance from preservation experts if needed.

Landmark designation offers advantages to owners who wish to preserve their properties. A bronze plaque bearing the name of the NHL and attesting to its national significance is presented to the owner upon request. NHL owners may be able to obtain federal historic preservation funding, when funds are available, and federal investment tax credits for rehabilitation as well as other provisions may apply.

The historic importance of potential landmarks is evaluated by the NPS and by the National Park System Advisory Board during meetings held twice a year that are open to the public. The Advisory Board includes citizens who are national and community leaders in the conservation of natural, historic, and cultural areas. Recommendations by the Advisory Board are made to the Secretary of the Interior on potential NHLs. Final decisions regarding NHL designations are made by the Secretary. Additional information on the National Historic Landmark program can be found on the NPS website at <http://www.cr.nps.gov/landmarks.htm>, or by contacting Carol Shull at (202)343-9504 or John Sprinkle at (202) 343-8166.

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